Understanding of consumer's awareness about brands in pharmaceutical industry: An empirical study

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Abstract

The pharmaceutical companies are adopting product differentiation as a marketing tool. The purpose of this study is to examine the awareness of patients about brand in pharmaceutical industry. Data are collected from 442 people regarding their interest in knowing details about prescription. Extracted component method and goodness of fit are the statistical tools adopted for analysis.

The findings indicated that the lower income group is more likely to repeat buying same medications for the similar symptoms. With education and income, various factors have emerged like 'comfort' and 'company name'. These patients have started inquiring prescriber about the details of medicine.

The changing scenario with respect to pharmaceutical industry is rarely studied with implications to its end consumer, that is patients. The above results will help marketers to design the marketing activity in such a pattern that suits the requirement of the today's patients. The findings of the paper will help the industry for promoting the medicine for condition in which it needs to be taken. The results also help pharmaceutical industry to contribute to better health and improve the positioning. Originality/Value: Consumers' view on a brand is not studied to the great extent. The three components that are perception, involvement, and buying behavior are analyzed through a scale.

Keywords

Differentiation strategies, consumer/customer perception, over the counter drugs, prescription drugs

Introduction

In India, the pharmaceutical industry mostly confined to ethical promotion for getting prescription from doctors. Consumers have awareness about advertised products of fast moving consumer goods industry (FMCG) sectors, but when it comes to life saving product, that is medicine, the interest is not much. The Indian Pharmaceutical Industry is one of the growing sectors of the Indian Economy.

It has been noted that consumers are rarely able to link a pharmaceutical product to pharmaceutical company even though they might be highly involved in the product (medicine). For consumers, it is enough to know that their medication works well and has few side effects.

In India, prescription drugs are not advertised, the sources of awareness are prescribers and chemists and stockiest in case of expensive lifesaving drugs. Online information has improved the awareness. Consumers of drugs prescribed by doctors rarely deal with pharmaceutical industry. In addition, for the most part consumers have very little knowledge, or motivation to know more about them. One major factor that may influence consumers association for pharmaceutical companies is a general attitude towards all types of medications. When it comes to over the counter (OTC) medicines, that is the medicines that are sold without the prescription, the influencing factors are sensory attributes.[1]

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There is an influence of product visual attributes on pharmaceutical OTC products and the consumption desire of consumers. So, pharmaceutical branding today is about expressing brand value that is valuable to the consumers. Building brand is a continuous process and is built by using different tools like sampling, making noise at clinic level through detailing, doctors meet, conference participation, gift, and other promotional materials.[2] In view of online access to some consumers, the prescription of a brand many times requires explanation and justification by a physician in big cities due to education and awareness. Therefore, it becomes important to undertake this research as there is paucity of similar research in pharmaceutical sector.

Many consumers believe that the industry is profiting unjustly, by charging too much money for lifesaving medications. This becomes important when patients are prescribed a branded product which is expensive. Basically, pharmaceutical products are classified under classical definition as unsought product.[2] Therefore, understanding of a brand by consumer becomes important.

A large extent of work has been done in OTC medicine about visual attributes, not much has been done in prescription medicines. The advertising message has to reach a billion people, speaking more than 18 different languages and scattered all across the Indian subcontinent. Color, size, and compliance are the problems in prescription medicines too. The purpose of this research paper is to see how consumers react for branded medicine, and to what extent is their involvement in drugs. The present empirical study attempts to measure the awareness and perception about the industry. There is paucity of similar research in emerging market.

Need for the study

The pharmaceutical arena is often seen as a distinct territory with in market research. Within this a vast volume and variety of work are conducted on national and international basis. Review of extensive literature suggested that not much emphasis has been given on consumers (patients) perspective of pharmaceutical brand. This becomes more important as more and more patients are getting aware about medicines due to Internet. Since the focus is on patients and physicians, focused efforts need to be undertaken by marketers to design strategy by keeping patients too in mind. Blood pressure detection camp and diabetic detection camp are few examples wherein pharmaceutical companies are involving patients too. But how these efforts are making patients aware about the brand and need a research as there is paucity of

similar research in this area. This study would help in introducing new positioning typologies in various segments. Another research gap found out in this area is identifying dimensions and characteristics of present perception about pharmaceutical companies in consumer's mind.

Literature review

Branding in pharmaceutical industry

Kotler et al.[3] defined brand as a "name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of these, intended to identify the goods or a combination of these, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors". AMA redefined "brand" in 2009 as "name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's goods or services as distinct from those of the other sellers. The legal term for brand is trademark. A brand may identify one item, a family of items or all items if that sellers. If used for the firm as a whole, the preferred term is trade name".[4] Conceptual framework, which served as the platform for the statements we used, was constituted of existing definitions for AMA.

Ambler et al.[5] take a consumer-oriented approach in defining a brand as: the promise of the bundles of attributes that someone buys and provides satisfaction. The attributes that make up a brand may be real or illusory, rational or emotional, tangible, or invisible.

The brand helps customers to make choices by delineating the unique qualities and value that the product or services provided to the customer.[6] Brands are argued to assist customers to make purchase decisions in increasingly cluttered retail environments, providing useful clue to product quality, attributes, and "personality".[7,8]

The definitions adopted in the research undertaken are consequential to the approaches of Kapferer[9] and many others as well as to the research undertaken by De Chernatony and McDonald.[10]

Furthermore, we also define the brand as Alt and Griggs[11] approached it; Blackstone[12] and Arnold[13] who defined brands as symbolic devices with personalities that users value beyond their functional utility. Gardner and Levy[14] also offer a definition according to which "a brand name is a complex symbol that represents a variety of ideas and attributes", whereas Murphy and Zajonc[15] suggested "Brands are said to add values to products".

Clark et al.[16] on the other hand offered another definition relating brands with "values", i.e. "Brand is values that provide the important link between

consumers and marketers" while Kapferer[17] approaching brands under a holistic view, claims that "A brand is not a product. It is a product's essence, its meaning and its direction and it defines its identity in time and space, too often brands are examined through their component parts: brand name, logo, design or packaging, its central concept is brand identity, not brand image". Few more definitions of brands are as follows: "A brand is a product of a specific producer/manufacturer which is differentiated from the competition by its name and its appearance", definition similar to the one of AMA. The focus of this definition focuses on differentiation of the product.

"A brand is the personality of a product, product group, or organization, as it is formed in terms of consumers' perceptions evolving from tangible and non-tangible characteristics".[10] It means that an identifiable product, service, person, or place augmented in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant unique added values which match their needs more closely.

"A brand is the name of a product", is reflecting a distinctive position among the defining elements of the brand.[18] In this definition, name of the product is a main aspect.

"A brand is any symbol and/or design which is associated with a product", which is an approach close to the references related with "legal instrument".[19,20] The emphasis is on logo, design, mark, and so on.

Branding has persisted for centuries as way to distinguish one producer's goods from another manufacturer's products and services. It occurs when the consumer has a high level of brand awareness and strong favorable and often unique association with that brand. Pharmaceutical industry has often modeled itself on the FMCG, where brands are viewed as the key assets of a company and all resources are utilized to create and develop brands. While the core principles and strategies for branding medical products are the same as for any other product, the differences in regulations of marketing and selling drugs have challenged the pharma industry to find new strategies that are acceptable practices in healthcare which is very well discussed by Zara Ladha.[21]

According to Schuiling and Moss[22] pharma companies have not worked proactively in identifying a brand and identity for their products and in communicating this identity to consumers. They have not done market research to determine their brand identity and to verify if this is how consumers view them. Pharmaceutical companies must embrace marketing and branding strategies than they had in the past. Even the most effective strategies implemented by a company could fail if consumers are very price conscious towards the reduction. Therefore, it is important to discuss the presence of generic drugs on the market, and the effect they have on consumers' decisions.

In particular, generic drugs, in the competition, are extremely important for pharmaceutical companies to understand the difference in consumer's perceptions and purchase intentions between branded and generic drugs. This understanding can help the pharmaceutical companies to better estimate the financial impact of drug when launching. Zara Ladha[21] studied perceived difference between generic and branded drugs in terms of efficacy, willingness of people to pay for branded drugs, and trust of people in doctor prescribed drugs.

Important factors studied were attributes like price, name, and doctor's prescription, past experience, advertisement, and promotion. The only influencing factor given more importance to prescription versus non-prescription medicines was that of physician's decisions. Other factors like in store promotion, price, family/friends, brand name, and advertising play a significant role in purchase making.

Current strategies in the pharmaceuticals industry have shown significant differences compared with the FMCG sector. In the choice of brand names, the basic naming strategies are the same, but the focus on them is different. According to Schuiling and Moss,[22] branding theory and practice in pharmaceuticals are still 10 years behind the FMCG area. The authors expect that pressure towards globalization will continue, and this will effect changes in the pharmaceutical industry in time.

Pharmaceutical industry is the most regulated industry and it is constantly under an attack from numerous interested parties trying to reduce the size of drug bill. It is true that, in other product categories, brands can exist forever if they are well managed, e.g. Coke. It is recommended that brand names be linked to corporate brand names and not exclusively to product names. There is strong need to create strong brand names with clear brand names with clear brand identity. The authors Schuiling and Moss[22] considered that doctors would be viewed as consumers. They also look for quality, efficacy, reliability, and need to be reassured. They operate on the basis of limited information and are influenced by the image of the company, their attitude towards the disease, and their patients.

They also make decisions for emotional reasons, not for rational one, secondly deciding how to communicate this in a coherent way to target customers. Further, companies need to adopt a three-step process when developing brands: first, identifying the brand identity via in-depth research (how it will be differentiated); second is to determine the image and thirdly to regularly monitor the brand image and manage it.

Based on exploratory research of literature, Elements of Ethical Brand Positioning, Sagar et al.[23] identified five fundamental elements of brand positioning, namely brand awareness, brand identity, brand image, brand personality, and brand communication. All these elements of brand positioning can be then blended with the ethical elements. Brand awareness consists of top of the mind recall, brand recognition, brand retention generation of faith, and bond with the brand. It also says about rational and emotional metaphors associated with the brand. Elements of brand identity are products, social acceptability, consumer value satisfaction, ethical issues of pricing of the products, company's social trust, logo name and people's acceptance of the brand, acceptability in the society in terms of quality and delivery of required benefits, culture, and geographical relevancy of the product.

Brand personality is studied as sincerity about value delivery, technical competence, imaginative and innovative, cheerful, socially responsive, and reliable. Brand image is associated thoughts with the brand, associated social metaphors, symbols, associated imagery with the brands' affordability. Brand communication is improving brand recall, socially acceptable advertisement, culturally relevant advertisement, generation of emotional bond, no unreasonable cross brand comparison, gender sensitive advertisement, no fear appeal, sensitive for the children, no subliminal advertising, no surrogate advertising, no propagation of false and elusive claims, culturally sensitive, regional sensitivity, cross cultural sensitivity, and no false association.

Gap analysis. From the above literature on branding, few gaps identified are addressed in the present study. Brand personality is not studied in depth with respect to pharmaceutical companies. Further, the communication, brand imagery with respect to medicines, extent of knowledge about medicine, age and awareness relationship on medicine, and gender and awareness of the branded medicine are identified as variables for study for further understanding. Keeping the above variables the following objectives are taken for study.

Research objectives

1. *To find out the awareness of branded medicine among consumers.* Brand awareness consists of top of the mind recall, brand recognition, brand retention generation of faith, and bond with the brand. Brand communication is improving brand recall. Therefore, there may be difference between genders.

2. *To investigate the association between gender and awareness of the branded medicine.* Gender sensitive advertisement has a role.[23,24]

3. *To check dependency between age and awareness.* Younger age group personnel due to exposure to digital communication may know more about medicine compared to older age groups. Brand and slogan awareness are dependent on the age.[25]

4. *To study the extent of knowledge about medicine.* This study will also throw information on the current status of knowledge of drugs among consumers.

Hypotheses: The following hypotheses are proposed:

According to Hémar and Gollety[26] age plays a role as children infer brand image from brand character better. Brand character establishes a close relationship. Awareness may have positive correlation with age. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Age and awareness of the pharmaceutical companies has positive correlation.

Recall and recognition are two important aspects when one talks about advertising and consumers awareness towards the brands. Ladha in 2007[21] studied perceived difference between generic and branded drugs in terms of efficacy, willingness of people to pay for branded drugs, and trust of people in doctor prescribed drugs. However, age affecting the awareness needs to be studied. According to Peckenpaugh[27] education is a key component for brand awareness. However, as media exposure is high, awareness is built. Therefore, our next proposed hypothesis for testing is:

H2: Awareness is independent of education of the consumer but there may be gender variation.

It is presumed that due to reach of TV and better interface between patients (consumers) and doctors, degree of education of consumers may not affect the awareness level. It is presumed that awareness of the brand may not lead to awareness about the company. Therefore, third hypothesis is pertaining to this area.

H3: Respondent knows fewer pharmaceutical companies.

Due to media, awareness will be better awareness of companies among consumers.

Methodology

Questionnaire design. The questionnaire has two parts. The first part consists of demographic

information of the respondent age, gender, education, family income, and birth year.

In the second part, the questions on how many pharmaceutical companies they are aware of and whether they take daily medication have been asked. Likert scale is made for rest of the variables under study like awareness of the brand, side effects advertising, and effect chemist's influence on buying the color and price parameters are asked to rate on agreement scale.

Collection of data. Data were collected by administering questionnaire. The reason for using questionnaire was to convert people's perceptions of brands into numbers and to investigate a larger number of respondents. The disadvantage with questionnaires is, however, that they often involve a low response rate and a lack of opportunities to clarify issues. This was resolved by self-administrating the questionnaire in a public environment, instead of using mail, phone, or other means of communication. The procedure also gave respondents the opportunity to clarify obscurities that emerged, instruct the respondents how to fill out the questionnaire, and to ensure that all questions were answered. Data are collected across India.

Sample selection. Sampling occurs when sampling units are drawn from a population and examined in detail. A judgment sample is selected on the basis of the judgment of researcher. Therefore, a primary survey was done to just find out the awareness of the consumer about the medicine brand and through this primary survey.

Sample size. The size of the sample depends on the basic characteristics of the population, the type of information required from the survey, and the cost involved. The application of an arbitrary percentage to population in calculating size fails to acknowledge the individual requirements of different surveys. The total sample size is 442, in which 262 males and 180 females participated.

Data analysis

Techniques used to test the hypothesis. Correlation measures the degree to which the change in one variable follows the pattern of change in another variable. It cannot be said that one variable caused the change in the other; in the sense that it can be guaranteed that a change in one thing will invariably produce another result. In fact, there may be a third variable that has not been considered, which may be the actual cause of both the variables being studied.

Results

Results are divided in to visual, descriptive, and inferential. The visuals give the demographic data of the participants

Visual

Figure 1 gives the demographic analysis of the respondents on company recall by males and females

The above chart depicts number of males and females those who participated in the study. The graph also reveals that 236 respondents are graduates, 34 have education up to 12th standard, and 164 are postgraduates. Majority of the recall, that is 3 to 5 companies, is coming from male. Majority of the awareness and recall come from graduates. However, this also is possible because the compositions of sample have more graduates, reflected in the chart. Of all, 96 females could recollect 3 to 5 companies.

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics for patient's awareness of medicines is reported in the following table.

The below mentioned parameters were asked on five point scale of agreement and disagreement (5 to 1). Mean and standard deviation are calculated and presented in Table 1.

This objective was to understand the awareness of patients for medicines. The mean is calculated and standard deviation as a measure of dispersion of the data.

Data revealed that company name is very important for them whose score is 3.21; also, respondents feel that branded drugs are expensive and the mean is 3.77. Other important factors are whether the patients are interested in knowledge about the products, its side effects, and formulation or contents of the drug, which are reflected through high mean score (3.65). Patients are willing to pay 100% more for prescribing a drug, which indicates that branded products from good company are preferred.

The basic thrust of marketing strategy depends on identifying a working value proposition that is "Packaging is what consumers see first in this marketing end game . . . this is why package structure will be a key differentiator of products in the near future".[28] The importance of packaging has been overlooked in the traditional marketing mix. The basic thrust of marketing strategy depends on identifying a working value proposition that is unique, and then trying to find a niche that will be an attractive segment.

Several gaps exist in the packaging of pharmaceutical products with reference to utility functions. The four P
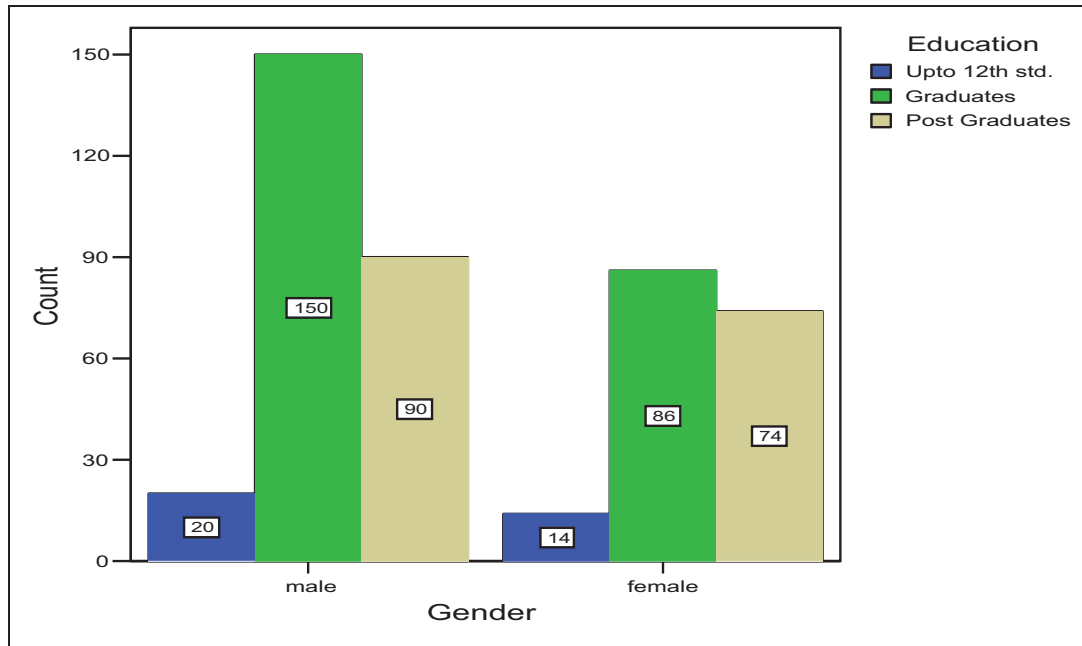
Figure 1. Demographic Analysis company recall ($N = 442$).

Table 1. Patient awareness ($N = 442$)

Parameters asked to patients to rate on 1 to 5	Mean	Standard deviation
When the drug is prescribed to me I look for the company name	3.21	1.174
I ask the doctor to prescribe me medicines of the particular company	2.24	1.12
I share the knowledge of the medicine with the physician	2.97	1.10
I ask a doctor about the side effects	3.65	1.03
I update myself with the new formulations	2.63	1.09
I am willing to pay 100% more for branded drug	3.11	1.16
Branded drugs are more effective than over the counter drugs	3.18	1.06
I purchase on pharmacists' recommendation	3.06	1.17
I will purchase the same brand for the same symptoms	2.88	1.12
I feel branded drugs are more effective	3.22	0.9
After I read or see an advertisement, I purchase it next time when in need of a drug	2.66	1.11
I feel branded drugs are more expensive	3.77	0.9
Once in a day medicine is more convenient for me when compare to twice or thrice a day	3.26	1.24
Color of the medicine is an important factor	2.24	1.12
Size of the medicine is an important factor	2.77	1.55

marketing mix classification can be viewed by suppliers as the customers' four Cs, i.e. customer value, cost to satisfy, convenience, and communication (the 4C perspective). The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has started the regulatory process to require bar coding on packages of prescription and the commonly used OTC drugs sold to hospitals and healthcare institutions (excluding physician samples). This is to cut the dispensing errors. Branded drugs are more preferred and are considered more effective by the majority of patients with mean scores 3.21.

Color of the medicine and taste of the medicine are equally important factors with the mean score of 2.77. Most of these older patients and sometimes even some of the younger ones have trouble remembering what pills to take and when. This is where packaging helps

in the form of compliance packs. In addition, the dual-drug pack introduced for the day-time only or night-time only user has been highly successful in boosting the pharmaceutical products overall sale. Convenience of dosage has a mean rating of 3.26, which again is a significant factor.

The National Pharmaceutical Council (NPC), an industry research organization, estimates that non-compliance with medication added over US $100 million annually to the US health care system, 11% of hospitalizations (over 1 million per year in the US) estimated to result from poor compliance with prescribed medication. To overcome problems of compliance in the elderly, healthcare providers advised to prescribe a simple dosage regimen for all medications to be taken (preferably one or two doses daily). The patients select cues that assist them in remembering to take doses (time of day, mealtime, or other daily rituals) to provide devices to simplify remembering doses (medication boxes). Single-unit doses, widely used in hospitals, may be cumbersome for elderly patients who have difficulty opening the foil-backed wrappers.

Child resistant blisters are a lot more difficult to develop than a bottle with a child-resistant cap because of the protocol tests. Some of the most effective designs in this category rely on cognitive ability rather than brute force. Socially focused work on packaging also looks at improving usability and ease of access for disabled customers and the elderly. Because of age related infirmities, many seniors do not have the strength to overcome the child-resistant features.

From the above descriptive statistics, it is analyzed that company name, when medicine is prescribed to them, is one of the important factor among all. The importance of recall is well-established; Aaker[7] points out that consumers understanding of brand's image derives initially from brand name and the association it elicits. From the above graph, it is clear that majority of the consumers could recall maximum 10 names. To increase the recall, as has been researched by (Keller Heckler and Houston) name suggestiveness increases recall in meaning with the brand name, it impedes memory of unrelated brand claims.

Inferential statistics

H1: Age and awareness of the pharmaceutical companies has positive correlation.

Recall and recognition are two important aspects when one talks about advertising and consumers awareness towards the brands. Age plays an important and positive role.[29,30] This is given in Table 2.

Two numeric variables age and number of pharmaceutical companies consumers could recall are

Table 2. Correlations on company recalled and age ($N = 442$)

		Number of company names recalled	Age
Number of company names recalled	Pearson correlation	1	.147
Age	Pearson correlation	−.136	.004
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.060	

Table 3. Cross tabulation ($N = 406$)

		Education			
		Up to 12th std.	Graduates	Post graduates	Total
Company name	Less than 3	8	42	16	66
	3 to 5 companies	10	132	84	226
	Greater than 5	8	48	58	114
Total		26	222	158	406

considered for correlation matrix. From the above correlation matrix, it is concluded that there is a weak negative correlation between the two variables. Correlation is not significant at 0.05 significance level. It concludes from the above analysis that there is no significant correlation between age and awareness about pharmaceutical companies. This is contrary to report of Dubow[29] and Subhani and Osman.[30]

H2: Education and awareness about pharmaceutical companies are positively correlated.

Education helps in understanding and rational thinking. Therefore, we have assumed that education will lead to better brand recall. Table 3 gives the data on the same.

Cross table provided above gives us insight about data of education level and company name recall. It can be inferred from the table that company name recall is dependent on education level. Chi square value calculated is 17.67 and the observed level of significance is 0.001.

The results are significant even at 0.01 level of significance. Hypothesis of dependency between company name and gender is tested for a grouping variable gender. The results were significant for males (Pearson chi-square 23.382) but were insignificant for females (Pearson chi-square: 5.329).

H3: Respondent knows fewer pharmaceutical companies.

There is always limitation to brand recall due to retention power. According to Srivastava[2] brand recall is only 10% to total brand exposed.

To analyze this assumption, one sample t test is performed. It is clear that patients recall for medicine is less than three. A left sided hypothesis of recall less than three companies is significant at 0.05 level of significance. The hypothesis of respondent's awareness about fewer companies is rejected.

The assumption here is to understand the dependency between companies patients could recollect and their annual income. The above test of goodness of fit is true at 0.05 and 0.01 significance level, proving that there is a significant dependency between recall and income. Income and awareness are not related. As per study of Gensemer et al.,[31] even higher tax payers are not aware of tax structure.

Conclusion

The above conducted empirical study gave insight into pharmaceutical industry. Clearly emerging factors like education have impact on understanding brand recall of pharmaceutical companies. The company name is very important for them when it comes to consuming a prescription medicine. A consumer, that is patient, could remember few companies, which indicates that though pharmaceutical companies are most important in their life, the recall is not registered. A dependency test was found significant for income and company recall number. The study may be of interest and useful to the companies in assessing their brand image from clients perspective, which it creates and influences with its efforts. The research can help in finding the congruence between a firm's presumed positioning strategies and consumer/customer perception of strategy.

Managerial implication

The changing scenario with respect to pharmaceutical industry is rarely studied with implications to its end consumer, that is patients. The above results will help marketers to design the marketing activity in such a pattern that suits the requirement of the today's patients. The findings of the paper will help the industry for promoting the medicine for condition in which it needs to be taken. The results also help pharmaceutical industry to contribute to better health and improve the positioning.

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Conflict of interest

None declared.

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